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ST. AUGUSTINE
LIFE WITH HISTORY AND TOURISM

DIGGING INTO A MYTHICAL PLACE
THAT STORY IS OUTRAGEOUS!
INDIAN POETRY ECHOES IN THE WIND
As St. Augustine commemorates its 450th anniversary this year, tourists from all over the world will visit this ancient city. I feel confident they will come away with a new perspective on the American colonial experience and the prominent role Florida plays in our nation’s history.

I HAVE THE BEST JOB IN FLORIDA. I really believe that. My job takes me to fascinating places with talented people doing really creative and important work. I have fallen in love with many Florida towns during my tenure at the Florida Humanities Council but none quite as passionately as St. Augustine.

I am fortunate that my explorations of St. Augustine have been guided by a distinguished group of scholars—historians, archaeologists, architects, and anthropologists—who have led our teachers seminars, written for FORUM, guided our “Gathering” cultural tours, and spoken at our grant-funded programs. Their inspiring scholarship reminds me of St. Augustine’s singular place in American history, the first place that Europeans built churches, schools, and government institutions. This has always been a truly multicultural enclave struggling to maintain ties with the “old world” while meeting the challenges of the “new world.”

One of the reasons I’m so drawn to St. Augustine is that for all its historic bona fides it’s also a real working town; not just a set of curated experiences, but real people working and living in a town that was founded 450 years ago. While I occasionally curse the traffic jams that clog the narrow streets, that frustration evaporates the minute I walk down Aviles Street; enter the splendor of Henry Flagler’s hotel, now Flagler College; or gaze out across Matanzas Inlet, wondering what the Timucuan Indians must have thought of Pedro Menendez’s approaching ship.

This issue of FORUM examines how the people of St. Augustine juggle the needs of a 450-year-old city with those of a modern-day city that hosts nearly six million tourists per year. It’s a complicated task that attempts to balance the needs for preservation with modernization. How does a city of 13,000 accommodate millions of tourists while maintaining the infrastructure and the quality of life for the people who live there? In a city where myth has played a powerful role in shaping the city’s image, how do you maintain historic authenticity?

As St. Augustine commemorates its 450th anniversary this year, tourists from all over the world will visit this ancient city. I feel confident they will come away with a new perspective on the American colonial experience and the prominent role Florida plays in our nation’s history.

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To read our colorful report on St. Augustine history, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
The oldest city today: Seeking balance

By Barbara O’Reilley

ST. AUGUSTINE, a historic jewel on Florida’s northeast coast, is a mecca for tourists. Each year, millions of people from all over the world walk its narrow colonial-era streets and soak in the stories of our nation’s often overlooked Spanish origins, indigenous peoples, first Underground Railroad, British (and pirate) incursions, and much more—including its opulent 19th-century reminders of the Gilded Age. About six million tourists visit annually—an economic boon but also a challenge for the 13,000 residents of this oldest city in the continental United States, which celebrates its 450th anniversary this year.

In the next pages you’ll read about how this small place struggles to balance the needs of its residents with the responsibility of historic preservation and the demands brought by modern-day tourism, its economic lifeblood. Last fall, local voters elected a new mayor who calls for solutions to traffic congestion and parking issues, improvements to city infrastructure, and other changes.

The city’s focus has shifted to attracting “heritage” tourists, who tend to stay longer as they delve into local history—in the process bringing deeper economic benefits with less coming and going, tourism officials say. Glenn Hastings, executive director of the St. Johns County Tourist Development Council, says, “Future growth in our heritage and cultural tourism will depend more on quality and less on quantity. We can’t let our success become our downfall.” Dana Ste. Claire, the city’s director of heritage tourism and historic preservation, describes these efforts in this issue.

Interestingly, just as modern-day activities evolve, our very understanding of the history of this place continues to evolve, thanks to city archaeologist Carl Halbirt and a team of scholars especially from the University of Florida. UF archaeologist Kathleen Deagan has unearthed evidence that the site of the Fountain of Youth, an iconic tourist attraction built on myth, is actually an authentic historic site where the Spanish first settled, just north of the current city. Along with that ironic story, enjoy our reports on some of the outrageous, or just plain odd, stories that are circulated about St. Augustine.

And don’t miss our look at current-day changes in St. Augustine’s historic African-American neighborhood, Lincolnville. Founded in 1866 by people freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, this leafy community of Victorian homes near downtown has become mostly white over the past few decades.

Also in this issue, some St. Augustine insiders introduce you to their favorite places in and around the city. Enjoy learning, too, about the favorite Florida place of writer Janis Owens.

As always, our regular poetry column by Maurice J. O’Sullivan is thought-provoking and fun to read. But this time, with its focus on the poetry of Florida’s native people, it’s especially poignant as we mourn the death of Buffalo Tiger, the legendary leader of Florida’s Miccosukee Tribe, who died Jan 6, 2015, at age 94. O’Sullivan’s column is aptly titled, “Echoes in the Wind.”

BARBARA O’REILLEY is editor of FORUM.

To listen to Buffalo Tiger and learn about his remarkable life, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
To commemorate its 450th anniversary, the City of St. Augustine presents a yearlong, citywide schedule of events, including:

- Concerts
- Historical Re-enactments
- Street Celebrations
- Signature Exhibitions
- Festivals

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To commemorate its 450th anniversary, the City of St. Augustine presents a yearlong, citywide schedule of events, including:

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- Street Celebrations
- Signature Exhibitions
- Festivals

For a full calendar of events, visit StAugustine-450.com or HistoricCoastCulture.com.
Inside an empty building on tourist-jammed St. George Street, another mystery unfolds. The detective wears a bright yellow bandana and is crawling in a pit 10 feet square, perhaps 2 ½ feet deep. He is Carl Halbirt, St. Augustine’s city archaeologist, and he reads layers of dirt, and the fragments they surrender, as well as the rest of us read the words on this page.

In St. Augustine, past weaves through present like a thread of gold in ordinary cloth. Dwellings hundreds of years old nestle near souvenir shops and gelato cafes in the heart of the old-town tourist section. Out on Highway A1A, traffic hums near archaeology projects that reveal St. Augustine’s founding by Spanish explorers in 1565. Twenty-first-century, urban development tiptoes around and over the historical record in the oldest continuously occupied city in the continental United States.

Somehow, in a city that is essentially a living museum, preservation and public access co-exist. A tourist economy based on history sustains this city of about 13,000 permanent residents in a county of more than 200,000. About six million tourists walk St. Augustine’s historic streets each year, generating an estimated $1.5 billion annually in heritage-tourism revenue.

But as America’s First City celebrates its 450th anniversary this year, its residents are talking about seeking a balance that allows for tourism without adversely affecting
the quality of life for local residents or compromising the preservation of its Spanish colonial treasures. That question was at the heart of issues debated during St. Augustine’s mayoral election last November. [See story on page 6.]

Over the past two decades, as tourism has grown incrementally, archaeologist Halbirt has worked to preserve St. Augustine’s heritage. By city ordinance he is called in to explore every site before it can be disturbed, putting him at the fulcrum of where progress meets the past. Any public or private development project that will disturb the soil more than three inches down must be examined for its archaeological value. St. Augustine’s ordinance, one of about a dozen such laws in the nation, assures that new construction won’t bury the past.

Halbirt, who has conducted an estimated 650 archaeological surveys over the past 25 years, has been a key player in uncovering the stories of early America in this place where Spanish explorers, missionaries, and colonists won a foothold long before British settlers arrived at Jamestown, Virginia (in 1607). History often is told through documents, maps, photos, and the surface landscape, but “archaeology is just as important,” Halbirt says.

The artifacts he has found number in the thousands—ranging from 4,000-year-old spear points left by indigenous people, to Spanish buttons and religious medallions from the 1600s, to British gunflints and musket balls from the late 1700s, to teacups and jewelry from the 1800s, to a city dog tag from 1902. He is credited with saving parts of more than 100 colonial sites in downtown St. Augustine.

One of the most important finds, Halbirt says, was the Spanish Franciscan mission community known as Nuestra Señora del Rosario de la Punta, or simply La Punta. More than 25 digs at the 30-acre site just south of downtown turned up thousands of artifacts documenting farm structures, dietary customs, and day-to-day activities of the settlement, occupied from the late 1720s to the mid-1750s primarily by Indian refugees of the Yamassee War and later by laborers the Spanish brought in from the Canary Islands.

Halbirt and the city government worked with a commercial developer to assure this historic city for decades, conducting digs and studies, writing books, and bringing students to learn in a “living laboratory.”

In 2010, UF received state funds to take over the management of 38 state-owned historical buildings in St. Augustine, including Government House, a centerpiece of the town plaza. There, UF recently premiered a multimedia exhibit, “First Colony: Our Spanish Origins,” which uses authentic artifacts, information, and materials to describe the beginnings of America’s first successful European settlement. After St. Augustine’s 450th anniversary year, the exhibit is expected to be shown around the country, communicating a part of the American story that is not widely known.

To operate its program in the city, UF established Historic St. Augustine, Inc., which manages the properties and exhibits and entered into a public-private partnership with entrepreneur Pat Croce to tell the story of the city’s Spanish origins and British occupation through displays and costumed reenactors in the Colonial Quarter. Croce’s popular Pirate & Treasure Museum is adjacent to this historical area.

In addition to work in the city, UF has curated and stored millions of St. Augustine artifacts in its Florida Museum of Natural History and has housed and digitized thousands of documents at two UF libraries in Gainesville.
the preservation of part of a proposed development that was within the La Punta site. Such planning is more important than actually keeping curious tourists from trampling over a dig, Halbirt says. “The archaeological work itself is not endangered. We’re kind of off the beaten path, and much of the work is done on construction sites where you just can’t come in and look around.”

The ordinance requiring archaeological investigation is not framed to stop projects, Halbirt said. “There has to be a balance between historic documentation and the viability of the community. There are two goals in an archeological survey.

What archaeological deposits are there, and how will they be affected by a project?”

But, just as Halbirt and others have succeeded in preserving parts of St. Augustine’s 450-year-old history, the onslaught of modernity and tourism has taken a toll. Big delivery trucks, heavy vans, and tourist buses rumble through St. Augustine’s narrow brick streets, which were designed for foot traffic and horses and carts. Halbirt has seen things that make an archaeologist cringe.

Two years ago, a delivery truck smacked into the balcony of the 1798-vintage Ximenez-Fatio House on Aviles Street, cracking supportive beams. St. Augustine’s houses typically

Both candidates emphasized that the city wants to better attract and serve “heritage” tourists—visitors specifically interested in learning about and seeing historic sites. This type of tourist tends to spend more nights in local hotels and more time in the city than those who are interested in visiting local beaches and other attractions.

Shaver said the city needs to work out how it can receive more of the revenue generated by tourism in order to pay for the costs of accommodating it. She also called for the city to do strategic planning and establish a long-range plan that would guide day-to-day decisions.

At the same time mayoral campaigns were taking place, a citywide “visioning” committee chaired by the vice mayor was meeting to create goals it hopes will help guide city officials. Top on its list of goals is creating a better strategy to deal with parking and traffic. Other goals include collaborating with tourist development agencies to promote St. Augustine as a distinctive historic community, becoming a model city for sustainability, and creating governing principles to balance interests of residents, businesses, and visitors.

POLITICAL NEWCOMER Nancy Shaver won her bid to become St. Augustine’s mayor last November on a platform that called for balancing the city’s tourism focus with more attention to local priorities like traffic management and infrastructure improvement.

“After years of putting attracting tourists first, we have reached a tipping point on traffic,” she wrote on her candidate website. “After 20 years of patching here and there, our streets need real attention, along with our water, sewer, and storm water systems.”

Shaver, who has 25 years of marketing experience that includes working at top corporate levels, defeated four-term incumbent mayor Joe Boles with 51 percent of the vote (2,650 to 2,531). Boles, a local attorney who served as mayor for eight years, said during a campaign interview with the St. Augustine Record that the city survived the economic recession better than many areas because of tourism, which is the local economic driver and number-one industry. He said efforts were ongoing to provide more parking and that roads and infrastructure were kept up as well as possible over the years.

ST. AUGUSTINE VOTERS OPT FOR CHANGE

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were built right up to the edge of the streets, many with overhanging balconies designed to provide shade. It was the third such accident at the Aviles Street house. Workmen again repaired damage, but the incident spotlighted one of the challenges of conducting modern-day life alongside sensitive historical treasures.

To assure that the buildings and other fragile pieces of the past remain intact, the city decided to prohibit motor traffic on some streets. One is a four-block section of St. George Street, a commercial strip that is also rich in history. Deliveries can be made there only by foot, using hand trucks and dollies.

Still, not everything can be saved, despite best intentions. In September 2014, an 1807 house collapsed during non-archaeological work on its oyster-shell foundation. A trench dug around the Fornells House on Hypolita St. caused a wall to collapse, which weakened the rest of the house to a point that it had to be demolished. “A major loss,” Halbirt says.

Only about 30 of the colonial buildings remain today. When Florida became a United States territory in 1821, about 300 were standing, but they gradually disappeared over time. Restoration of the colonial area began in the 1960s. Over the last several years, at the request of the state, the University of Florida has taken on the responsibility of maintaining and operating many historical St. Augustine properties built, restored, or reconstructed over the past few centuries.

Halbirt’s current project on tourist-jammed St. George Street precedes renovations of a building that will become a tourist-oriented Five and Dime General Store. The site previously was a nautical shop that closed about six years ago. Before the precision archaeology could begin with trowels, spoons, and brushes, workers used a jackhammer to break a concrete floor so the soil beneath could be reached. The resulting vibrations rattled an early 19th-century house next door, but no apparent damage resulted. Still, this is the kind of thing that worries Halbirt. “We don’t want to create a lot of disturbances ourselves. We think about monitoring for vibrations,” he noted.

The dig requires work on hands and knees, sometimes using commonplace tools. “Don’t we have a bigger spoon?” asks Halbirt, crawling around in one of the pits, avoiding an uncovered sewer pipe and dodging under a two-by-four lying over the excavation.

“Are you going to limbo under there?” asks Kelcie Lloyd, a volunteer.

“My limboing days are over,” replies Halbirt, 62.

Outside, thousands of visitors amble past the project as the diggers fill big buckets with soil, which is dumped onto a yard-square screen with quarter-inch mesh. From the screen, volunteers Nick McAuliffe and Kelcie Lloyd pluck a chunk of Native American “basket weave” pottery, a rooster’s leg with the spur intact, and a pig bone. They see flashes of color. Up comes a piece of Spanish pottery painted blue, green, and yellow. It’s called San Luis Polychrome, McAuliffe said.

Halbirt and the volunteers are working in a pit that seems to be revealing a kitchen site from hundreds of years ago. They sort items into cups: two different ones for the pottery, one for rusty items like nails and scissors, one for miscellaneous items like fish scales, a piece of shot, and chunks of charcoal.

“It’s always very dramatic when things pop out of the screen,” said McAuliffe, a retired librarian from Massachusetts and president of the St. Augustine Archaeological Association. The association supplies many of Halbirt’s 15-member volunteer crew. Part-time city employee Mischa Johns is his only other helper.

Halbirt, who works hard at being accessible, answers questions from strollers who do take the trouble to stop and ask. Reporters pop by. The daily St. Augustine Record treats archaeology like other newspapers cover business news. Sometimes teachers shepherd goggle-eyed students to one of his work sites.

“[Archaeology] is both a job and a hobby for me,” Halbirt says. “It’s always exciting. You can never tell what you’re going to hit, what you’re going to uncover.”

JON WILSON, a longtime Florida journalist, is a frequent contributor to FORUM.

To dig deeper into St. Augustine archaeology, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
T. AUGUSTINE arguably has the greatest collection of historic and archaeological resources in the nation. After all, the city has been lived in every day since its September 8, 1565, founding. That’s four and a half centuries of history that researchers and archaeologists have been deciphering since the late 1800s. Add to this the thousands of years of Native American settlement prior to European contact, and you have a pretty impressive resumé. That’s a lot of history to live up to, and a lot of history to protect.

Historic preservation is a basic tenet in St. Augustine. The city has ordinances in place to protect its heritage, zoning laws that for the most part prevent the encroachment of the carnival culture that plagues cities like New Orleans and Key West, and ordinances that require archaeological excavation of property before it is disturbed by development.
St. Augustine has become a major heritage/cultural destination, its popularity growing significantly over the past two decades. Each year, some six million visitors travel to the area, with most seeking out history-related experiences that range from exploring the centuries-old Castillo de San Marcos fort to shopping St. George Street with its rich historic ambience (the southern section of the street is part of a 16th century town plan). Without doubt, the heritage landscape is what brings most people to the city.

Tourists learn that the city is a place of many firsts. It was the first permanent European settlement in the U.S., the site of the first Catholic Parish church, the first city government, and home to the first free black settlement. St. Augustine Bay was the first port for transatlantic trade and commerce, and the town was the site of the first hospital and tavern. The oldest streets and squares in St. Augustine are part of the first European town plan established in 1572. Add to this the beautiful Gilded Age buildings constructed in the late 1800s, when hotelier/railroad magnate Henry Flagler made the city a world-class resort. And add St. Augustine’s historic civil rights battlegrounds of the mid-1960s.

This unique history, the story of the very foundation of America, draws specialized visitors, making heritage/cultural tourism the largest industry in St. Augustine (and in the surrounding St. Johns County). It provides jobs for over 12,000; and economic impact, both direct and indirect, has been recently measured by the Tourist Development Council as exceeding $1.5 billion annually. Sustainability means protecting the authenticity of the city, because the economic consequences of ignoring this are profound: when you chip away at the historic fabric, or color a story too many times, heritage tourists—a truly particular breed—will take notice and go elsewhere for meaningful vacations. Heritage/cultural tourism is big business nationally, and there is a great deal of competition among destinations to draw compatible audiences. Compromising the historic integrity of a heritage destination will bring community, political, and economic backlash.

Building sustainable tourism programs hinges on a good understanding of visitor behavior, mainly their preferences and expectations. Layers of quality cultural experiences bring tourists to the city and keep them in town longer, bringing big tourism dollars to St. Augustine. Just as important to a community that is sometimes quick to fault tourism for everything from traffic congestion to social degradation, the heritage destination in turn generates quality residential amenities that include great restaurants, art galleries, museums, concerts, and special events that...
simply would not be here without tourism. This connection isn’t always understood or embraced.

St. Augustine’s recent focus has been on elevating and enhancing the cultural and heritage landscape. Public programs have ranged from a Picasso exhibit (from the Picasso Foundation in Malaga, Spain) to comprehensive exhibitions on the history of St. Augustine. Exhibits have included “Journey: 450 Years of The African-American Experience,” which spanned most of 2014, the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, and told the story of African Americans in St. Augustine; and “The First City through the Eyes of Masters,” which presented 45 original paintings of St. Augustine by renowned 19th-century artists Frank Henry Shapleigh, Anthony Thieme, Williams Staples Drown, George Seavey, and others.

The city’s newest exhibition is “Tapestry: The Cultural Threads of First America,” which tells the story of the true multicultural founding of America in St. Augustine, where 800 Spanish and African colonists merged with hundreds of Native Americans at the Indian Village of Seloy. This show opens April 4 and runs through October 4, 2015, at the St. Augustine Visitor Center.

All are part of an effort to grow the city into a premiere cultural destination that will attract a specialized demographic: tourists who seek history-related experiences and are willing to spend more money visiting these sites. Tall ships in the harbor and events like reenactments, archaeological excavations, and Spanish Wine Festivals create a richer heritage landscape for both tourists and residents, making St. Augustine not only a better place to visit, but also a better place to live.

DANA STE. CLAIRE is St. Augustine’s director of heritage tourism and historic preservation and director of the city’s 450th commemoration.
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T. AUGUSTINE’S FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH—one of Florida’s oldest and most iconic tourist attractions—was built around pure myth. But, in a twist of history, archaeologists have found over the past 80 years that this site is actually an authentic and important historic place. No, that’s not because they’ve really found a source of water that brings eternal life. It’s because archaeologists have uncovered a trove of artifacts there proving that this waterfront acreage, just north of downtown St. Augustine, is the spot where Spanish colonists first landed in 1565 and established the nation’s first permanent European settlement.

“We say this is the place where legend meets history,” says John W. Fraser, managing director of the family-owned tourist business. “We want people to know that we are so much more than a drink of water.”

The 15-acre site was opened as the attraction “Paradise Park and Rose Gardens” in 1874 by florist H.H. Williams. In 1898, Luella Day McConnell, aka “Diamond Lil” of the Klondike gold rush, purchased it (allegedly with a handful of diamonds) and promoted it as the location of the fabled Fountain of Youth sought by Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León. Walter B. Fraser, grandfather of the four current owners, purchased the attraction in 1927, improved upon it, and further promoted it. Fraser went on to become St. Augustine’s mayor (1934–1942) and state senator (1944–1948). He was a leader in the city’s historic preservation movement and Florida’s tourism industry. His posthumous induction in 2014 into the Florida Tourism Hall of Fame attests to those accomplishments.

The first hint that the Fountain of Youth site had a hidden history came in 1934, when a gardener planting an orange tree uncovered an old human skull. Fraser called in the Smithsonian Institution. Excavations revealed more than 100 skeletons of Timucuan Indians, the indigenous people who populated that area before the Spanish arrived. The position of the remains indicated that they were Christianized and that a church was likely nearby. Further exploration at the site revealed the remnants of Nombre de Dios, the first Franciscan mission dedicated to bringing the natives to Catholicism.

Since 1976, archaeologists, primarily from the University of Florida and led by scholar Kathleen Deagan, have excavated the site, now called the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park. More than 97,000 artifacts have been found.

In the process, archaeologists have pieced together a story of 450 years ago, when 800 Spanish soldiers and civilians, led by Admiral Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, settled near the Timucuan Indian village of Seloy on the land that now holds the Fountain of Youth park and the adjacent Mission Nombre de Dios, a chapel and shrine rebuilt over the centuries by the Catholic Diocese of St. Augustine. The Spaniards built houses and a defense wall, perhaps a fort, and
remained there, coexisting with the Timucuans, for about nine months. But tensions grew, and the Indians forced the Spanish to flee to Anastasia Island. Ultimately the colonists resettled a couple of miles south of their original site, at the location of today’s downtown St. Augustine.

Deagan, UF’s Distinguished Research Curator of Archaeology Emerita and Lockwood Professor of Archaeology, now is studying some long-lost artifacts and excavation reports by UF archaeologist John M. Goggin, who conducted digs on the property in the early 1950s.

Deagan completed yet another dig on the property last summer. She hopes Goggin’s reports will help her determine whether the Spanish actually built a fort there.

Meanwhile, the Fraser family recently donated all artifacts found on the site, valued at nearly $3.5 million, to UF’s Museum of Natural History.

In looking back at all these discoveries, John Fraser says he appreciates even more his grandfather’s decision to keep the park as a park—and not to sell out to developers. “He had offers to sell the site, my father had offers, and we have had offers,” Fraser said. The family intends to preserve the site for visitors to appreciate and for researchers to further explore the roots of America. “The idea that someone owns an asset like this is incredible,” he added.

MARGO C. POPE is a freelance journalist whose previous career spanned 42 years with the St. Augustine Record and the Florida Times-Union. She is a member of the St. Augustine Historical Society Board of Trustees.
OUTRAGEOUS
(or just odd) stories about St. Augustine

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED if the stories you hear about historic places are really true? We asked a few St. Augustine history buffs to set the record straight about their city.

TALL (AND SHORT) TALES
Some tour guides have been overheard saying that Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León was less than 5 feet tall and that the indigenous Timucuan Indians were 7 feet tall. That may make for a fun story, but it’s not true, says Chad Light, a historical reenactor who portrays Ponce as well as Spanish admiral Pedro Menéndez, founder of St. Augustine. The average height of Spaniards was about 5 feet, 8 inches; and skeletal remains of Timucuans indicate they were about 6 feet tall, he says.

GHOST? WHAT GHOST?
Many tourists come to the historic Peña-Peck House to ask about the ghost of “Miss Anna,” says Mary Jane Little, a volunteer docent there. But no ghost of Anna Burt, the last owner (who gave the house to the city), has ever been sensed.

WHERE THE BODIES ARE BURIED
Bodies really are interred under the altar of the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Augustine. Three crypts dating from the 1700s hold the remains of two early pastors and the church’s contractor. But, there is no truth to rumors that the Spanish killed 53 Huguenot children and secretly buried them under the historic Tovar House, says Susan Parker, executive director of the St. Augustine Historical Society.

NO SECRET TUNNEL
According to legend, there is an underground tunnel connecting Hotel Ponce de Leon and Hotel Alcazar that was used for illicit activities. But there is no tunnel. Think about it: The hotels were built on filled-in marsh. During every heavy rain, the streets flood; an underground tunnel would be underwater.

RUMORS OF A MISTRESS
Contrary to lore, it is highly unlikely that railroad magnate/hotelier Henry Flagler built a certain house on Sevilla Street for his mistress in 1910. He would have been 80, says Flagler biographer Tom Graham. The site of that house, which features etched-glass images of women embracing, was an orange grove during Flagler’s time.

To listen to stories about swashbuckling Spanish privateers, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
YES, WE HAVE NO COBBLESTONES
How many times have you read in travel stories about St. Augustine’s “quaint cobblestone streets”? Well, St. Augustine’s historic streets are not made of cobblestones, notes Barbara Golden, communications manager for the local visitors and convention bureau. The oldest city’s streets are lined with bricks.

SEX AND THE SIEGE
Let’s put to rest any rumors about what St. Augustine’s 1,500 residents did when they were holed up inside the Castillo de San Marcos for 50 days at the end of 1702 while British invaders attacked and burned the city. Apparently there wasn’t much hanky-panky within the fort’s coquina walls. Baptismal records kept by the Catholic Church show only two newborn baptisms nine months later, according to an article written by Susan Parker, executive director of the St. Augustine Historical Society. In fact, there were only eight births during the year following the siege, a sharp drop from the previous year’s 35 births.

BUILDING WITH SEASHElLS
Two unique materials used in construction in St. Augustine and the surrounding area might not be approved by modern building codes, notes Herschel Shepard, preservation architect: coquina (a type of local shellstone) and tabby (a type of vernacular concrete made with oyster shells, lime, and sand).

MARGO C. POPE, longtime journalist in the St. Augustine area, contributed most of these stories.
INCOLNVILLE, a leafy neighborhood walking distance from downtown St. Augustine, has entered a new chapter in its remarkable history. This 45-block area, once the heart of the city’s black community, is now mostly white.

Originally named Africa when it was founded in 1866 by blacks freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, it grew over the years to become a vibrant place of ornate Victorian-era homes, churches, schools, businesses, restaurants, grocery stores, and other institutions. While it always had some white residents, Lincolnville was a predominantly black neighborhood that provided most of life’s needs during the days of segregation.

“We didn’t think about segregation,” said Myrtis Mason, who, with her husband Otis Mason, grew up there in the 1930s and 1940s. “We weren’t talking about boycotts because we were so happy where we were and what we were doing.” [See accompanying article.]

But in the 1960s, Lincolnville became a launching place for civil rights demonstrations that attracted international attention. An iconic photograph shows civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. holding up his fingers in a “V” for victory sign at Lincolnville’s famous Iceberg Restaurant when he got word of the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Outlawing the kind of segregation found in downtown St. Augustine resulted in removing the captive base of customers from Lincolnville businesses. People began moving away. The neighborhood began to fall on hard economic times—deteriorating and seeing an increase in crime.

Then in the 1980s, when real estate prices became prohibitive in some other parts of St. Augustine, whites began buying property in Lincolnville. In 1991, the neighborhood was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Real estate speculators found Lincolnville particularly desirable during the boom of the early 21st century—valuing its proximity to the city and its Victorian architecture. The racial pattern of both ownership and occupancy switched from a black to a white majority. A city report showed that as of 2012, about 65 percent of Lincolnville residents were white, 30 percent were black, and about 4 percent were listed as other racial groups, likely Asian and/or Hispanic.

While some residents point to the transition as a positive development, a revitalization of a neighborhood that had deteriorated, others mourn the loss of a once great black haven where history was made.

DAVID NOLAN, St. Augustine historian, provided information for this article.

Otis and Myrtis Mason

TIS MASON HAS FOND MEMORIES of a closely knit Lincolnville community where people sat on their front porches; kids could run and play basketball, horseshoes, croquet, and tennis; and mothers could call them home with a whistle. He and his wife Myrtis became educators and principals at local schools, and, in 1984, Otis Mason was elected superintendent of St. Johns County schools, the first black to hold the position.

“My mother could whistle,” he recalled. “We had a family whistle [sound] and she would come out of the house and stand on the sidewalk and she would whistle. That would get us to come home so we could eat supper…

“There were events in the community that people came out for. It wasn’t all black or all white, primarily black and white…When Joe Louis was the boxing champ, we would listen to his fights on the radio. Folks would sit on their front porches and play the radio and listen to the fight…”

“Everything was segregated at the time [but] I don’t think we missed anything...We made our own fun so we didn’t know any different.”

Mason’s current retirement activities include heading the Excelsior Museum and Cultural Center of Lincolnville, which tells the city’s African-American history and is located in the old neighborhood school where he was a student and later a teacher. He frequently meets with students and teachers at Otis Mason Elementary School.

MARGO C. POPE, a journalist for 42 years at The St. Augustine Record and The Florida Times-Union, provided information for this article.

To listen to civil rights pioneers discuss St. Augustine’s struggles in 1964, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
In 1565, Menendez disembarked his Spanish Galleon and stepped onto rolling dunes and coastline to found the city of St. Augustine. And while those beaches in the nation’s oldest city are still here today - almost as unspoiled as he discovered - so is a historic town that never stops progressing, preserving and mystifying. Whether that’s with our cuisine, lodging, nightlife, attractions or natural wonders. Come be a part of history. Make our 450th year a special one for you, too.

For a list of 450th events and lodging deals, visit FloridasHistoricCoast.com/StAugustine450.
Florida Humanities Council Board welcomes four new members

Floridians from Naples, Miami, Tallahassee, and Fort Lauderdale have been elected to serve three-year terms on the 25-member Florida Humanities Council Board.

New members are:

Juan Bendeck, an estate and tax attorney in Naples, who is a member of the Florida Gulf Coast University Planned Giving Committee, the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, and the Council of Hispanic Business Professionals. Bendeck earned his bachelor’s and law degrees at the University of Florida.

Gregory Bush, history professor at the University of Miami, who is a founder of Miami’s Florida Moving Image Archive and initiated a public-space program with high school teachers involving the study and redesign of parks. A specialist in modern American history, Bush attended Colgate University and George Washington University and received his Ph.D. from Columbia University.

David Jackson, chair of the Department of History, Political Science, Public Administration, Geography, and African American Studies at Florida A&M University. Jackson has also chaired the John G. Riley Museum of History and Culture and the Florida National Register Review Board. He received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Memphis.

Audrey Ring, Vice President of Communications for AutoNation in Fort Lauderdale, who is involved with several community organizations in the Broward County area. Before joining AutoNation Inc., Ring was employed by Broward County Port Everglades, Sea-Land Service, and Associated Conferences Secretariat. She is a graduate of Florida State University.

Our workshops offer teachers great learning opportunities

Attention educators! Don’t miss our exciting upcoming professional-development workshops at fascinating sites around the state:

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- **Finding Florida in Spain** (June 11–19): Trace our state’s cultural roots in Spain.
- **Calusa, Creeks, and Crackers** (June 15–19): Learn about Florida’s earliest inhabitants and pioneers.
- **Civil Rights: The View from St. Augustine** (June 15–19): Study the civil rights movement at one of its major sites.
- **450 Years of St. Augustine** (June 22–26): Experience our nation’s oldest city and hear its stories.
- **The Civil War in Florida** (July 9–12): Discover the crucial role Florida played, beyond the battlefields.
- **Water: The Oil of 21st century** (July 20–24): Consider our historical and cultural relationship with water.

Go to FloridaHumanities.org for information and application forms.

Check out our annual report online

We are publishing the 2014 Florida Humanities Council Annual Report online. See it at FloridaHumanities.org.

Veterans speak, communities listen

Florida military veterans are telling their stories on stage in the Tampa Bay area through April 1—and in a statewide PBS documentary slated to air next fall. The performances, titled “Telling: Tampa Bay,” and the documentary are sponsored by the Florida Humanities Council under the national Telling Project. The goal of this project is to help bridge the communication gap between veterans and an American society in which less than 1 percent of the population has served in uniform over the last dozen years of war.

For more information, go to FloridaHumanities.org.

GRANT DEADLINES

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To learn more about our grants, which fund community-generated humanities projects, go to FloridaHumanities.org
Calendar: FloridaHumanities.org

Here are some highlights of the hundreds of free public events we sponsor around the state. Dates and times are subject to change, and new events are continually added. For complete, up-to-date listings, go to FloridaHumanities.org.

**ST. PETERSBURG**
**APRIL 14** at 6 p.m.

St. Petersburg Museum of History

Professors Gary Mormino and Ron Granieri discuss Florida’s national and international role during World War I.

**FERNANDINA BEACH**
**APRIL 23** at 7 p.m.

Karibo Café

Scholar Gary Monroe discusses Cassadaga, a spiritualist community founded in central Florida more than a century ago. It is based on the idea that spirits of the dead commune with the living.

**MARCO ISLAND**
**APRIL 28** at 7 p.m.

Marco Island Historical Museum

“Settling, Sweating, and Swatting in the Everglades” tells the story of life on Florida’s last frontier.

**PANAMA CITY**
**MAY 18** at 7 p.m.

Visual Arts Center

Professor Tom Berson examines how springs were—and still are—symbolic representations of natural Florida at the fragile intersection with growth and development.

**MIAMI**
**MAY 22** at 7 p.m.

WDNA Jazz Gallery

Loren Schoenberg, saxophonist and artistic director of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem, shows how the rhythms of jazz contain the musical DNA tracing a dynamic and surprising journey from Africa to the rest of the world.

**Historian Gary R. Mormino receives top writing award**

Historian Gary R. Mormino, known as “Mr. Florida” to many because of his prolific writing and detailed knowledge about the state, has won the 2015 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award for Writing, sponsored by the Florida Humanities Council. A five-person panel selected Mormino, 68, from among 15 nominees—praising him as “the essence of a humanist” who has had a major impact as a writer himself and as one who has influenced many other Florida writers.

A history professor at the University of South Florida for more than 35 years, Mormino co-founded the Florida Studies program at USF St. Petersburg, where he is the Frank E. Duckwall Professor of Florida History Emeritus. In retirement, Mormino continues to teach part-time and is the Humanities Council’s scholar-in-residence.

The most widely known of Mormino’s many books and monographs is the popular Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida, the basis for a statewide PBS documentary produced by the Humanities Council in 2007. Mormino has also written many articles over the years for FORUM.

To watch historian Gary Mormino tell stories about intriguing Ybor City residents, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.

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MY FAVORITE ST. AUGUSTINE PLACE

RAWLINGS HOUSE AT CRESCENT BEACH

By David Nolan

When I first moved to St. Augustine’s then-sleepy Crescent Beach in 1977, I would walk along the sand and plunk down in front of the house that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings bought in 1939 with money she made from The Yearling. I would commune with literary visitors past like Robert Frost, Ernest Hemingway, Zora Neale Hurston, and Dylan Thomas. The long wooden house that perched atop a high dune had been the main residence of Marjorie and her second husband, Norton Baskin, until her death in 1953 and his move into town a decade later. By the time I came along, it was an endangered species. The aging house buffeted by beach winds, coated daily with ocean dew, and sitting atop two potential building lots had become real estate gold to developers and a nightmare for preservationists. I acquired a new hero in 1988 when Mary Elizabeth Streeter came along in the nick of time to save it from being torn down. Every time I drive down coastal Highway A1A, I cast an appreciative—and thankful—glance up at that dune at one of Florida’s great literary landmarks.

DAVID NOLAN is a St. Augustine historian.

LAKE MARIA SANCHEZ

By Laura Lee Smith

My favorite St. Augustine place is Lake Maria Sanchez, a shallow little mere on the eastern edge of my neighborhood, Lincolnville, south of downtown. It used to be an undefined creek. But in the 1880s, Henry Flagler filled in the north part of Maria Sanchez Creek and dredged out this tidy, perfectly-shaped oval, around which I pace three or four laps nearly every day. What’s special about it? It’s pretty. It’s quiet. It’s surrounded by old homes that are interesting to look at. But more than that: Lake Maria Sanchez is where I’ve puzzled out every character and scene I’ve written over the last decade in my novel and stories. At low tide, if I’m lucky, the roseate spoonbills show up. In winter the hooded mergansers take over. The south end floods during heavy rains; you have to goose-step through squelching sod to maneuver the pass. It’s beautiful, this lake. My think tank, I suppose.

LAURA LEE SMITH is the author of Heart of Palm, winner last year of the Florida Book Award silver medal for general fiction.
When I was 13, my mother, Angela Cox, took me to the Old Spanish Treasury, circa 1750, home of the Woman’s Exchange of St. Augustine, on St. George Street. As an Exchange member, she led tours, did shop duty, and worked on luncheons and special events. Since 1993, I have lovingly shared the Peña-Peck House, its official name, with friends and visitors, too. Its first resident was Spanish Royal Treasurer Juan Estevan de Peña. He was followed by two British governors, then several private families. Dr. Seth Peck’s family lived here for 94 years. Peck’s granddaughter, Miss Anna Burt, left it to the city in 1931 for a house museum. Come, step back in time.

MARGO C. POPE is a longtime Florida journalist.

St. Augustine’s heritage landscape is replete with historic sites that span four and half centuries. There are the conspicuous sites, like the ancient Castillo de San Marcos fort, and others that are off-the-beaten-path treasures, like Aviles Street, arguably the oldest street in America. One of the most interesting in the city is also one of the most obscure—the fountain of faces, as it is often called, or the more proper name, La Fuente de los Caños de San Francisco. It’s a big Spanish name for a monument that hides behind the Visitor Center at 10 Castillo Drive. A gift from Avilés, Spain, the working fountain is a near-exact replica of the renowned 16th-century landmark in Avilés. The baroque-style monument features six stone masks, each with a different expression. The fountain is a bit of quiet sanctuary worth visiting; but perhaps most important, it is deeply symbolic of the long ties St. Augustine has had with Avilés, Spain—the very place that founder Don Pedro Menéndez de Avilés sailed from in 1565.

DANA STE. CLAIRE is St. Augustine’s director of heritage tourism and historic preservation.
During my college years, when I returned home to St. Augustine for summer breaks, one of my favorite places to waste an afternoon was Matanzas Inlet, 14 miles south of the city. The tranquility of the area belied its name. Mantanzas, the Spanish word for “massacre” or “slaughter,” refers to the execution of French forces by Spanish soldiers near this site 450 years ago. But for me this place was a haven, an area that the condo developers somehow forgot. Its backdrop was the remote Fort Matanzas, surrounded by untouched woods. When friends joined me, we could light a fire on the banks of the river and be as loud as we wanted without worrying about upsetting anyone. Those brave enough to go for a swim after sundown would likely be treated to a bio-luminescent display lighting up each stroke through the dark water. Some days I think about revisiting that remote beach, but I worry that time and development have caught up with it. I’d rather keep that magical place alive in my memory.

ALEX BUELL is a program coordinator for the Florida Humanities Council.

The Oldest Streets in the United States

By Susan Parker

I love to walk against traffic on the narrow streets in the very oldest part of St. Augustine. The view is 180 degrees from what you see behind a steering wheel. You can find a small architectural item or an unintentional niche where a fern or small flower has cozied up to the shellstone wall. You might see pink coral vines or red trumpet vines hidden from a motorist. Look through the iron or wooden grille in a gate. Perhaps a statue, fountain, or decorative tile lies beyond. You are ambling along the oldest streets in the United States, laid out in the late 1500s with no thought of motorized vehicles. You may need to stand close to a house wall as a car passes, walk surefooted over bricks, and check for what “gifts” the horses that pull sightseeing carriages may have left behind. Enjoy a unique St. Augustine experience.

SUSAN PARKER is executive director of the St. Augustine Historical Society.

Mantanzas Inlet

By Alex Buell

During my college years, when I returned home to St. Augustine for summer breaks, one of my favorite places to waste an afternoon was Matanzas Inlet, 14 miles south of the city. The tranquility of the area belied its name. Mantanzas, the Spanish word for “massacre” or “slaughter,” refers to the execution of French forces by Spanish soldiers near this site 450 years ago. But for me this place was a haven, an area that the condo developers somehow forgot. Its backdrop was the remote Fort Matanzas, surrounded by untouched woods. When friends joined me, we could light a fire on the banks of the river and be as loud as we wanted without worrying about upsetting anyone. Those brave enough to go for a swim after sundown would likely be treated to a bio-luminescent display lighting up each stroke through the dark water. Some days I think about revisiting that remote beach, but I worry that time and development have caught up with it. I’d rather keep that magical place alive in my memory.

ALEX BUELL is a program coordinator for the Florida Humanities Council.
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I was born as far north in the state as you can go without exiting into Alabama, so I grew up with a firm prejudice toward all things east of the Suwannee and a corresponding love of all things west. Even today when I am forced by economics (my husband’s job transfer) to live part time in Virginia, I take great care to introduce myself as a native of West Florida, from right up there in old Marianna, just below the state line.

My meticulous explanation is lost on my Virginia neighbors who raise a polite eyebrow at my zealosity, as I sound more Kentucky than Florida—quick and twangy, with vowels that dance around like children playing musical chairs. My neighbors are too polite to argue but secretly have me pegged as a self-hating Kentuckian who married a military man and, after a long stretch stationed in Florida, now claim native status. Such disloyalty to birthplace is as despised there as it is here, but there isn’t much I can do to disabuse the notion. The more I insist, the guiltier I sound, and I fear that I am headed into an Ancient Mariner–type old age where I obsessively corner strangers and foist upon them my story of origin.

I doubt my situation is unique, because Crackers in general (and North Florida ones in particular) are so at one with our sense of place that the notion of Zen does not even describe it. We are our place, and our place is so beautiful that I have long since made peace with the constant influx of immigrants, simply as a matter of good sense.

Who would not want to live in paradise, when paradise is an option?

My own paradise and de facto Favorite Place in Florida isn’t a metropolis, a town, or a Magic Kingdom, but only my own backyard in rural Alachua County, eleven miles west of Gainesville. When traveling outside the state, I describe it as halfway between the Suwannee River and Gainesville. To natives who are yet uncertain, I tell them it’s on the back way from Tallahassee to the FSU/Florida game that goes through Newberry, a description that is immediately understood. (Ah, yes, by the produce stand with the good boiled peanuts.)
The lush “living cathedral” that author Janis Owens uses as a meditation garden—and some in her family use as a private shooting range.

To listen to our lively program on Florida Cracker music and its cultural roots, go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
I live so far off the beaten path that to call my yard a yard is a stretch, as any grass grows there only by coincidence. It’s not even a swept yard, but a barely tamed 20-acre swath of mixed hardwood forest surrounded by an apron of closed canopy woods so dense that light never touches the well mulched ground. Such canopies are rare in modern life, and ours is intact by a quirk of history. According to a local elder, the lumber company that deforested this part of the county at the turn of the last century had its offices here and never put its own yard through the rigors of a wood harvest. The woods were left untouched, with live oaks so hardy they are a marvel of nature, as wide as a Buick, with limbs so thick and low that a goat herd we once owned roosted in the low-slung branches. The trees are so impenetrable that they’re largely a mystery to me, though a merry community of snakes, gophers, giant woodpeckers, and wood wrens live there. The only mammals foolish enough to intrude are rabbits, raccoons, and my intrepid yellow dogs who chase anything that moves and return covered in thorns and scratches, feeling very sorry for themselves.

I limit my wanderings to the mixed hardwoods that once were part of the extensive phosphate mines surrounding Newberry at the turn of the last century—until the first world war brought an end to free trade with the Germans who both owned the mines and were their largest customers. The abandoned pits, which range in size from mammoth to yawning, were transformed in the last century by subtropical sun and rain into lush sunken gardens. We have one on our property, as do most of our neighbors. Being industrious Crackers, we still use ours in a multipurpose way, for bonfires in winter and during the rest of the year as a shooting range and meditation garden—never at the same time, of course.
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The meditation garden, lush with fern and bromeliads, is the perfect place to pray and ruminate; a massive oak above provides a living cathedral ceiling, and the wren and sparrow are the choir. Since it has a nice slope on the west side of the pit and a steep limestone face on the east, the gun lovers of the family cannot resist using it as a private shooting range when the need to discharge firearms overcomes them. They are forbidden to shoot bunnies or bromeliads and must stick to the targets, but the fact remains that I pray for peace on earth surrounded by the spent shells of a whole lot of armament.

Have I mentioned that I live in Cracker Florida?

For visitors who prefer to avoid unregulated shooting ranges when savoring the local woods, I recommend a visit to our area’s unique and breathtaking natural wonder: the pristine waters of the North Florida springs systems. I live in the happy center of too many of them to name, some on the Suwannee, others on the Santa Fe, and a good many just plunked down wherever the aquifer chose to reveal a glimpse of its glittering surface. In my early life, before air conditioning (yes, I’m that old) a trip to the springs was as close to paradise as I ever expected to see this side of the grave. In middle age, I am still of the same mind.

The springs provide cold dips in clear, aquamarine water on the hottest day, scuba diving year-round, and serene views always. Some are privately owned, but many are state or county parks. They include large cavern-sized pools with crystal clear fissures that expel ice cold water fresh from the aquifer in bubbling, Jacuzzi-like swirls we call boils. The deepest parts are usually lined by diving docks where the young and the intrepid can dive, flip, and cannonball into the glorious depths of the deepest part of the spring. For the shyer swimmer, there are countless mossy springs off the beaten path, with homegrown, appropriately whimsical, names like Naked Spring on the Santa Fe and Bathtub Spring at Rum Island.

We also have access to salt water, not in the swelling waves of the Atlantic, but the serene salt pond known as the Gulf of Mexico. Like all things Cracker, the beaches of the Big Bend, from Panacea to Cedar Key, are products of glorious fusion, the shoreline blending from dry land to water in a thousand little estuaries and creeks. The sunsets are the best in the world, and a quick glimpse at your favorite food apps will bring up a dozen great seafood places. One of my favorites is Roy Deal’s in Perry. Another is Spring Creek Restaurant in Spring Creek, where Florida naturalist, writer, and all-around good guy Leo Lovel serves up great seafood and even better tomato pie.

Lovel’s restaurant anchors the tiny hamlet of Spring Creek. After a nice round of fish and dessert you can walk down the pier and watch a crimson sunset or stroll an Old Florida village and, in the long tradition of the state, concoct wild plans to relocate there and build a second home.

It’s the power of the beauty here in my backyard, a siren call to strangers that bids them to stake their claim to paradise. It’s the story of my Florida.

JANIS OWENS is an award-winning author who has written four novels, My Brother Michael, Myra Sims, The Schooling of Claybird Catts, and American Ghost, and one cookbook, The Cracker Kitchen. She lives in Newberry, Florida, and Abingdon, Virginia.
Civil Rights in the Sunshine State

The Museum of Florida History presents Civil Rights in the Sunshine State to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights movement in Florida through artifacts, archival images, film footage, and oral histories to educate visitors about Florida's significant contributions to the movement. This ground-breaking exhibit is one of the first attempts to look at the Florida civil rights movement through a statewide lens. From Miami to Tallahassee and St. Petersburg to St. Augustine, the Florida movement is examined at the local, state, and national levels.

Visit Florida's History Shop for a featured selection of great Civil Rights merchandise!

The Museum of Florida History presents Civil Rights in the Sunshine State, on display through April 5, 2015.

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Dale Kennington
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DESPITE OUR REMARKABLY RICH LIBRARY of Florida literature, one shelf is far too short. The natives who lived here for thousands of years before Europeans first sailed along our shores left behind some remarkable artifacts and a sophisticated canal system but no stories or poems, myths or legends. Most of what we know about their culture comes from those who arrived as their rivals and remained as their interpreters.

One of those interpreters, Juan de Castellanos, has left an extensive description of the Calusa who lived along Florida’s Southwest coast in the first part of his monumental Elegías de varones ilustres de indias (1589). Using the ottava rima, an eight-line stanza traditionally associated with heroic subjects, Castellanos marvels at the communal lifestyle of the Calusa and their fearlessness in hunting what he called whales (ballena) but may well have been manatees:

No nada con tal impetus sirena,
Ni por las bravas ondas tan esperta,
Pues cada cual y no con mucha pena
Entre voraces peces se despierta;
Matan en alta mar una ballena
Para la repartir después de muerta,
Y aunque ella se zabulla, no se ciega
El indio, ni de encima se despega.

No puede con sus fuerzas no ser flacas
Desechalo de encima las cervices
El indio lleva hechas dos estacas,
De durisimas ramas ó raices:
Y en medio de las ondas ó resacas
Se las mete de dentro las narices,
La falta del resuello la desmaya,
Y ansi la hacen ir acia la playa.

No not even sirens can swim with such speed
Nor prove so expert among whitewater waves,
For all of them with no difficulty
Move among rapacious fish.
After killing a whale in the ocean,
They divide their catch among themselves.
And when their prey dives, without fear
The Indian will ride its back under the water.

Even with its enormous power,
It cannot shake its rider from its back.
The Indian carries two stakes
Created from sturdy branches or roots,
And in the middle of the rolling waves
Drives them into its nose.
The absence of air dismays it
And forces it to the beach.
The few native people who survived European settlement and diseases united with members of other tribes, especially Creeks, who migrated into Florida and formed the Seminole and Miccosukee tribes. Even they, however, left it to others to document their epic battles for survival, especially in the Second Seminole War (1835–1842), the longest, most expensive, and deadliest of all the 19th-century Indian conflicts.

As Northerners grew disenchanted with the financial and human cost of that war, they became intrigued with Osceola, the charismatic warrior who consistently outfought and outwitted U.S. forces. When the army finally seized him during truce talks, public outrage exploded. Unsure of how to deal with a captive who was widely seen as a hero, the military sent him to Fort Moultrie in South Carolina where they treated him like a celebrity, allowing artists like George Catlin and Robert J. Curtis to paint him and even arranging visits to Charleston.

To memorialize one of those visits, James Burchett Ransom, who would later serve as secretary to the wonderfully named second president of the Texas Republic, Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar, wrote “Osceola at the Charleston Theatre.” Osceola’s death soon afterwards inspired poets throughout the century. In 1891 the country’s most influential poet, Walt Whitman, hearing a description of the Seminole’s final day from one of the marines who had guarded him and familiar with Catlin’s widely reproduced portrait, included a poem about him in the final edition of Leaves of Grass.

What may look like an odd fragment in a work already regarded as a literary landmark might well be less an incomplete poem than Whitman’s tribute to an unfinished life and legacy.

Much of our knowledge of Seminole poetry and song comes from the original songcatcher, Frances Densmore, who transcribed and recorded their music in the early 1930s for the Smithsonian Institution. An ethnomusicologist who devoted her life to documenting Native American poetry and music, she published her transcriptions as Seminole Songs in 1956. While most of the songs—largely part of their games, hunting, and dance rituals—are in the Seminole languages, she does include a few translations.

One song recreates “The Seminole Removal,” the federal government’s attempt to relocate the tribe to the Western Indian Territories. Literary historians will, of course, note that, without additional documentation, we can never know when the Seminoles first sang this song. Is it a contemporary response by someone walking their Trail of Tears or an imaginative recreation years later? Seminoles undoubtedly find such questions naïve, irrelevant to the song’s truth and beauty.

A portrait of Osceola (1838) by artist Robert J. Curtis.

When his hour for death had come,
He slowly rais’d himself from the bed on the floor,
Drew on his war-dress, shirt, leggings, and girdled the belt around his waist,
Call’d for vermilion paint (his looking-glass was held before him,)
Painted half his face and neck, his wrists, and back-hands.
Put the scalp-knife carefully in his belt—then lying down, resting a moment,
Rose again, half sitting, smiled, gave in silence his extended hand to each and all,
Sank faintly low to the floor (tightly grasping the tomahawk handle,)
Fix’d his look on wife and little children—the last:
(And here a line in memory of his name and death.)

They are taking us beyond Miami
They are taking us beyond the Caloosa River
They are taking us to the end of our tribe
They are taking us to Palm Beach, coming back beside Okeechobee Lake
They are taking us to an old town in the west.

Like “The Seminole Removal,” a birth song uses a rhythmic chant, with its insistent repetition of words and phrases to emphasize the newborn’s connection with both nature and the cycle of life.

You day-sun, circling around
You daylight, circling around,
You night-sun, circling around,
You, poor body, circling around,
You wrinkled age, circling around
You spotted with gray, circling around
You wrinkled skin, circling around.

Come.
A number of years ago I interviewed the legendary Miccosukee leader Buffalo Tiger for a Florida Humanities Council program on “Making Florida Home.” We began by talking about the history of our families and the importance of passing stories down through the generations. Then I raised the question of why his ancestors and those of the Seminoles had left behind so few written records of their stories and songs. He told me that his people taught their children to find joy in the present because they had suffered so much in the past. Why remember such pain? Then he paused, smiled gently and asked if spending so much time recalling our history had made my Irish relatives or my wife’s Jewish family happy. Could those memories, he wondered, imprison us and block light from our lives?

Perhaps the best responses to Buffalo Tiger’s questions come from Seminole poets themselves. In “Native Poems,” the introduction to his collection Nightfall (2006), the writer and painter Elgin Jumper sees himself as “a celestial writer / riding the orange tail of a shooting star glittering gold.” His highly chromatic poetry helps him to “smile from behind dark clouds / allied with the long night of sorrow” and imagine a future which will allow “turquoise / poetry to come invade my silvery night.”

For the Seminole Tribe’s Poet Laureate, Moses Jumper, Jr., poetry not only allows him to affirm his identity as he moves cautiously between the two cultures in which all contemporary Native Americans must live, it also offers him moments of transcendence. In the title poem of his collection Echoes in the Wind (1990), he sees language as a way both to collapse and to escape the boundaries of time and space.

If but for a blissful moment,
one feels caught with hope and pride,
with time to spare
and no emotion to hide.

The experience begins to flow as one writes
of perhaps a different place or time.
Confuses a little, but soon the flow of
words are jotted line for line.

It is with moments like this that one expresses
a place, a time of where he is going
or where he has been.
And then, silently he listens
for the echoes in the wind.

MAURICE J. O’SULLIVAN, an award-winning teacher, writer, and filmmaker, is professor of English and Kenneth Curry Chair of Literature at Rollins College in Winter Park.

To watch Moses Jumper, Jr. read his poem, “Indian Cowboy Dreams,” go to Digital FORUM at FloridaHumanities.org.
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